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Atari Online News, Etc.
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->From the Editor's Keyboard
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"Saying it like it is!"

It's late Friday night, and I just got home from work - I'm beat! I had most of this week's issue put together, but still had many small things to get done before the issue can hit the bricks! So, I'll forego talking about anything this week so I can get your weekly dose of A-ONE out at a "reasonable" hour.

Until next time...

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Well, there aren't enough new messages in the NewsGroup to make a column, so they'll go in the folder to add to next week's.

This week's column is going to be short, but I do want to talk about President Obama's speech the other day in Egypt. And I wanted to try to avoid comparing it to speeches given by U.S. presidents in the... oh, in the past eight years or so.. but let's face it, it's just too good to pass up. So I won't. [Grin]

President Obama, with this one speech, laid out his international agenda and set us on a new path. Well, he set us upon an OLD path, actually. It's the path we were on before the "either you're with us or your against us", "Of course there are WMDs, we said so", "might-makes-right" attitudes of the past administration.

Harsh? Not hardly. People around the world, politicians and businessmen and farmers and school teachers in every country in the world need to know what we're about. Too many already have a bad opinion (and often justifiably so).

Let's face it, America's sphere of influence is global. Every economy, every business, every educational institution, every army in the world is

influenced by the United States in some way.

Yes, that's an awesome power. But, as has always been the case, with great power comes great responsibility. The days and ways of those who would squeeze the rest of the world like juicing an orange and discard the soggy, misshapen rind are over... for now. Perhaps it is only because we now find ourselves in need of a... 'course correction', but we ARE a different country than we were just a few years ago. I have no illusions about the possibility of again returning to the ideologies and practices that had/have so many watching us closely and mistrustfully, but for the time being, it's going to have to be enough that we are upon the path we're on now. What matters more than the past is the present, for it is upon the present that the future is built. None of us have much control over what has come before and what will come after. What we DO have control over is what we do here and now; what decisions we and our lawmakers and administrators make.

We, as a country, have made some bad choices of late. No, there's no sense laying it all upon the shoulders of a few. We are all responsible to some extent. I mean, heck, we ELECTED those guys in the first place, right? Oops. I forgot. We DIDN'T! Okay, we lay the blame squarely upon their shoulders this time. [evil grin]

It's going to be a long road back to where we want to be... where we SHOULD be regardless of what the talking heads on TV and radio say. IF we cannot provide for and protect our friends and neighbors around the world and provide help and assistance wherever needed without condition, then we are fated to go the way all other empires in our history have gone. Personally, I'd like to see that avoided.

I'm not saying that everything is going to be all roses and sunshine now. I'm pretty sure that we're going to have many more rocky times. And we've still got some work to do before we're back where we were, but we'll get there. As far as I'm concerned, the "rights rollbacks" that we encountered... that we allowed... over the past eight years, will take some time to erase.

Personally, I am perturbed that we haven't rolled back all of the changes that had been made in the name of national security and the safety of the citizenry, and I hope that most things like warrant-less wiretaps, "sneak 'n peek" searches and National Security Letters are stopped, but I'm not sure that we'll ever see the days of clear-cut, immutable... or should I say "inalienable" civil rights, again.

That's one of the reasons I think it's so important to get as many new Justices on the Supreme Court as we can, as fast as we can.

I'm not talking about "packing" the bench with liberals. While Rush Limbaugh (aka The Hot Air Buffoon) and Newt Gingrich label her as "racist" and "activist", the truth is that she is somewhat conservative on most topics. That doesn't make her a bad choice, in my opinion. Sure, I'm as liberal as they come, and I believe in liberal ideals, but what's even more important than that is having someone INTERPRET our Constitution in an honest way. The Supreme Court is not (or should not be) about politics. It should be about determining the Founding Fathers' intent when righting the Constitution.

I disagree with Justice Scalia's opinion that the Constitution is a static document and that it means only exactly what it says as we 'understand' it to say. How often have you heard someone stumble over a

prayer or a song because the words were... old fashioned? They just can't grasp the meaning of the old words and phrases. And sometimes, the old and new meanings are completely different.

Well, the Constitution was written two and a quarter centuries ago. The results of what a Twenty first Century American would glean from a 'carved in stone' reading of many passages would probably would have left the authors a gasp and confused. I'm sorry, Justice Scalia, but the Constitution was MEANT to be interpreted. It was meant to be a living, growing, evolving document. That's why the Founding Fathers gave us the ability to amend it. But somehow I get the feeling that Justice Scalia would like to do away with a lot of the amendments... Well, a lot of the first ten anyway. For those unfamiliar with the first ten amendments to the Constitution, they're also known as... The Bill Of Rights. The Founding Fathers obviously never envisioned that a "Bill Of Wrongs" might also be a good idea.

Well, that's it for this time around, folks. Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - Sony Unveils New PSP Go!
"Tetris" Turns 25!
X-Men Origins!
And much more!

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!
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Sony Unveils New PSP Go

Sony on Tuesday unveiled a sleek next-generation PSP Go handheld videogame, movie and music gadget in a direct challenge to Nintendo's freshly-launched DSi devices.

Sony Computer Entertainment president Kaz Hirai showed off a new PSP Go at a press conference in the Shrine Auditorium as a major Electronics Entertainment Expo (E3) got under way nearby in Los Angeles.

"We call it the worst kept secret of E3," Hirai quipped, referring to news of Go news leaks more akin to streams.

"There will be more content that is easier to get on your PSP. It's

entertainment everywhere."

Go is half the size of the original PSP and built to download and store video, pictures and games, according to Hirai. Go devices have built-in wireless Internet and Bluetooth capabilities.

"It's built for people who live a more digital lifestyle," Hirai said.
"It's designed to bring all kinds of content to the PSP."

All future PSP videogame titles will be available for digital download, skipping any need to buy software on disks, according to Sony.

A new Sense Me feature analyzes music stored in Go devices and then creates playlists to suit users' moods. Go gadgets will also be built with a video delivery service Sony launched last year.

Hot videogame franchises including "Gran Turismo," "Metal Gear Solid," and "Resident Evil" are creating new games tailored to Go devices, according to Sony.

"I think the PSP is getting really hotter," said Hideo Kojima, whose eponymous studio makes the "Metal Gear Solid" franchise whose protagonist is a fearsome soldier called "Snake."

"And Snake is coming back on the PSP."

Go devices will be priced at 249 dollars, or 249 Euros respectively, when they are released in the United States and Europe in October, according to Sony. The gadgets will be available in Japan in April, Hirai said.

Nintendo reports that it has sold more than a million of its new-generation DSi handheld videogame gadgets in the United States since they became available here in April.

Electronic Arts Stages Fake Protest of Game at E3

Electronic Arts has been playing games with attendees of the nation's biggest video-game trade show.

The game publisher hired a group of nearly 20 people to stand outside the Electronic Entertainment Expo in Los Angeles on Wednesday and appear to protest the upcoming EA game "Dante's Inferno." EA spokeswoman Holly Rockwood says the stunt was arranged by a viral marketing agency hired by EA.

The group claimed to be protesting the third-person action game - loosely based on Dante Alighieri's poem "Divine Comedy" - because they said the game glorified eternal damnation.

The fake religious protesters passed out pamphlets and held up picket signs with messages such as "Hell is not a Video Game" and "Trade in Your PlayStation for a PrayStation."

The hustle and bustle in Los Angeles is over for this year's Electronic Entertainment Expo (E3) trade show, which closed Thursday, and the future of video gaming can be summarized with one word: Motion.

After letting Nintendo's Wii have most of the motion-sensing fun for some time with its revolutionary motion-detecting sensor, this year Microsoft and Sony showed their own initiatives to get players moving.

Microsoft's innovation was introduced by movie director Stephen Spielberg, who proclaimed that interactive entertainment's next step is "to make the controller disappear." Microsoft's Project Natal - pronounced "nuh-tall" - uses speech and facial recognition, along with navigation by bodily motion, for game control.

The system combines a RGB camera, a depth sensor, a multi-array microphone, and a custom processor running proprietary software. It is compatible with any Xbox 360 system.

"It can recognize you just by looking at your face," Microsoft said, "and it doesn't just react to key words, but understands what you're saying." And, again following Nintendo's lead of including the family, Microsoft set the bar for using its system quite low. "If you know how to move your hands, shake your hips, or speak, you and your friends can jump into the fun."

"Clearly," said Michael Gartenberg, a vice president at Interpret, "Nintendo's success with the Wii has resonated with the industry." He added that, if Project Natal "can be delivered to the market in a timely fashion," it could be "potentially a huge thing."

Nintendo, which began the motion craze, previewed its soon-to-be-released Wii Motion Plus, which enables smaller hand motions and better targeting for players. It is also continuing to expand the Wii into new directions with, for instance, the Wii Vitality Sensor, which detects the pulse in your finger and could be used for relaxation feedback - or, as Nintendo's president suggested to news media, it could be used to measure how frightened you get playing horror games.

Motion-based controllers were also showing up in more familiar shapes. Activision showed a skateboard controller for its Tony Hawk: RIDE game, and a turntable controller for DJ Hero.

Sony also showed a wireless PlayStation 3 Motion Controller that uses a PS Eye camera, although it's still being developed.

Much of Sony's emphasis was on its newest PlayStation portable, the new PSP Go or PSP-N1000, which will be available in October. The PSP Go offers 16GB of flash memory to store games delivered over the PSP Network. It also highlighted new software for its portable game devices, including a new, downloadable music recommendation feature that will suggest playlists based on mood.

And, of course, there were lots of new game titles shown, including Tom Clancy's Splinter: Cell Conviction for the Xbox 360; Uncharted 2: Among Thieves and God of War III for PS 3; Wii Fit Plus and Wii Sports Resort for Nintendo's console; and, for the venerable PS2, more than 100 new game titles.

At 25, 'Tetris' Drops into Place as Gaming Icon

With its scratches and sticky brown beer stains, the "Tetris" arcade machine near the back of a Brooklyn bar called Barcade has seen better days. Which makes sense, given that the machine was made in the 1980s.

Even today, though, it's not hard to find 20- and 30-somethings plucking away at its ancient controls, flipping shapes made up of four connected squares and fitting them into orderly patterns as they descend, faster and faster as the game goes on.

"You could just play infinitely," said Michael Pierce, 28, who was playing against Dan Rothfarb, also 28. Both have been fans since they - and the game - were young. "Tetris" has its 25th birthday this week.

Pierce recalls playing "Tetris" on a Nintendo Game Boy that was on display in a department store when his family couldn't afford the unit. Rothfarb played on his Nintendo until the game wouldn't go any faster.

Completed by a Soviet programmer in 1984, "Tetris" has come a long way from its square roots. It's played by millions, not just on computers and gaming consoles but now on Facebook and the iPhone as well.

"Tetris" stands out as one of the rare cultural products to come West from the Soviet Union during the Cold War. And the addictive rhythm of its task-by-task race against time was an early sign of our inbox-clearing, Twitter-updating, BlackBerry-thumbung world to come.

In her book "Hamlet on the Holodeck," Georgia Tech professor Janet Murray called "Tetris" the "perfect enactment of the overtasked lives of Americans." The game, she wrote, shows the "constant bombardment of tasks that demand our attention and that we must somehow fit into our overcrowded schedules and clear off our desks in order to make room for the next onslaught."

Many people who grew up with "Tetris" haven't stopped playing.

"I'd stay up, wait for my parents to go to bed, smuggle my Nintendo into my bedroom, hook it up to my television and play this game until all hours of the morning," said John Clemente, another player at Barcade. "Tetris," he says, was the only game to drive him "to the point of insanity." As a child, he once kicked his Nintendo across the room.

"It was a very love-hate relationship," he said.

"Tetris" is easy to pick up. Rotate the falling shapes so that you form full lines at the bottom of the screen. Fit the shapes so there are as few open spaces left as possible. Aim for a Tetris: four lines completed in one swoop. Repeat. Watch your score zoom.

But Tetris is hard to master. Because the shapes - technically known as tetrominoes - come in a random order, it is hard to predict the best way to organize them so that they can form neat rows.

In fact, in 2002, Massachusetts Institute of Technology researchers determined that the potential combinations are so numerous that it would be impossible even for a computer to calculate the best place to put

each falling shape. Erik Demaine, an associate professor of computer science, praised the game's "mathematical elegance," which perhaps stems from the background of its developer.

Alexey Pajitnov was 29 and working for the Moscow Academy of Sciences when he completed "Tetris" on June 6, 1984, for a Soviet computer system called the Elektronika. A computer programmer by day who researched artificial intelligence and automatic speech recognition, Pajitnov worked on the game in his spare time.

"All my life I liked puzzles, mathematical riddles and diversion," Pajitnov said in a recent interview from Moscow. "Tetris," he said, was just one of the games he made back then. The others are mostly long forgotten.

Pajitnov's creation spread in Moscow through the small community of people who had access to computers. Word filtered through computer circles to the West, where the game drew the interest of entrepreneurs. A company called Spectrum HoloByte managed to obtain PC rights, but another, Mirrorsoft, also released a version. Years of legal wrangling followed, with several companies claiming pieces of the "Tetris" pie - for handheld systems, computers and arcades.

Complicating matters, the Soviet Union did not allow privately held businesses. The Soviet state held the "Tetris" licensing rights and Pajitnov had no claim to the profits. He didn't fight it.

"Basically, at the moment I realized I wanted this game to be published, I understood that Soviet power will either help me or never let it happen," he said.

It wasn't until 1996 that Pajitnov got licensing rights. Asked whether he made enough money off the game to live comfortably, he says yes, but offers no more details. Today, he is part owner of Tetris Co., which manages the game's licenses worldwide.

Nintendo Co. was an early and big beneficiary of the game, which stood out from its mid-'80s peers because it had no characters and no shooting.

When Nintendo was preparing to release its Game Boy device in 1989, the company planned to include with it one of the games that are also classics today: "Super Mario," "Donkey Kong" and "Zelda." But Nintendo wanted something everyone would play - a "perfect killer game" that would sell the Game Boy, said Minoru Arakawa, the president of Nintendo of America from 1980 to 2002.

The solution was "Tetris" - though Nintendo needed help from Henk Rogers, a U.S. entrepreneur.

Rogers had spotted "Tetris" at the International Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas and bought the rights to a PC version of the game in Japan from Spectrum HoloByte. In February 1989, he went to Moscow on a tourist visa to try to get the rights for Nintendo. He spent his first day in a taxi with a driver who didn't speak English, communicating by gestures and trying in vain to find the ministry of software and hardware export. The next morning, he hired an interpreter and things went more smoothly, and "Tetris" got bundled into the first Game Boy.

Since then, "Tetris" has expanded to all kinds of devices and inspired a generation of knockoffs. Tetris Co. says 125 million copies have been

in Leesport, Pa., in early May.

The game costs \$15.

"It has been successful," Leftwich said. "It has already exceeded my expectations. A man told me that he had more fun playing my game than any other game at the convention."

Leftwich, 33, is expected to graduate in August with an associate's degree in applied science from Surry Community College. He is a simulation and game-development student enrolled in a joint program with Wake Technical Community College in Raleigh.

Prehistoric Times is a "homebrew" release, a new game for an old gaming system as it runs on the Atari 2600 system. Introduced in 1977, the Atari 2600 was the first machine to use interchangeable cartridges with games on them. It had games such as Space Invaders and Adventure.

"I loved playing Atari when I was a kid," Leftwich said. "That is partially why I wanted to develop the game."

Leftwich's game is about a lone prehistoric man struggling to survive by hunting animals in a forest. The game is made up of three screens showing the man and a volcano that produces lava and increased heat at higher levels. Players also try to find a mysterious treasure.

Leftwich created the game using batari, a computer programming platform developed to write programming for the Atari 2600.

Jody Hartle, an instructor in the simulation and game-development program at Surry Community College, said in an e-mail that Leftwich is a conscientious and imaginative student.

"His classmates have always looked to him for leadership and guidance," Hartle said.

Leftwich belongs to the "classic game" community - people who enjoy computer games developed in the 1980s and 1990s.

He has worked as a manager for a Blockbuster video store in Mount Airy for 10 years. He also started the Surry Game Development Group, which helps students learn the skills they need to move into the simulation and game industry, Leftwich said. The group is a chapter of the International Game Developers Association.

Computer games have become popular in American culture because they offer a more "immersive" form of entertainment than movies, television or books, Leftwich said. People can interact with the characters in the world that they experience in the games.

"That is what keeps people coming back," he said.

Computer gaming is a relatively young industry with many opportunities, he said. It also can be profitable.

Halo 3, a computer game, made more money in the first week of its release than the movie Spiderman 3, which was released during the same week of September 2007, according to news accounts.

As the computer-gaming industry evolves, Leftwich said, it will need

people with skills and vision.

Leftwich said he is a "pretty normal guy," and he rejects the stereotypes of people interested in computer games as "nerds living in their parents' basements."

He wants to work as a game developer, a level designer or programmer within five years. In 10 years, he wants to be a leading designer or producer in the gaming industry.

"I want to stay on the creative side of things," Leftwich said. "I feel I am ready to move into one of those roles."

Walter Rotenberry, Leftwich's instructor at Wake Tech, said that Leftwich is a "top-notch" student. He called Leftwich's game "a real achievement."

Leftwich goes beyond his course's requirements and has found new ways to use the tools in game development, Rotenberry said.

"I wish all of my students would take the next leap and develop their games," Rotenberry said.

Leftwich can reach his professional goals, Rotenberry and Hartle said. Leftwich has applied to several gaming companies in the Triangle.

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

China Rounds Up Dissidents, Blocks Twitter

Ahead of the 20th anniversary of the bloody crackdown on Tiananmen Square this week, Chinese authorities have rounded up dissidents and shipped them out of town. Now, they've even shut down Twitter.

Along with their usual methods of muzzling dissent, the authorities extended their efforts Tuesday to silence social networking sites that might foster discussion of any commemoration of the events of June 3-4, 1989.

The action is a new sign of the government's concern of the potential of such technology in an authoritarian society where information is tightly controlled.

"There has been a really intensified clampdown on quasi-public discussion of awareness of this event," said Xiao Qiang, adjunct professor of the Graduate School of Journalism at the University of California-Berkeley, and director of The Berkeley China Internet Project.

"It's a discussion about where China is now and where China can go from here. So the authorities are making a major crackdown to block

user-generated sites such as Twitter and show there is no right to public discussion," he said.

China has the world's largest online population, and Internet communities have proven increasingly influential in spreading word of events to everything from student protests to group shopping excursions.

People are going outside the normal, controlled channels to set up communities online, spreading information about campus unrest and other activities that the government considers to be potentially subversive.

Government Internet monitors have shut down message boards on more than 6,000 Web sites affiliated with colleges and universities, apparently to head off any talk about the 1989 events, according to the Hong Kong-based Information Center for Human Rights and Democracy.

Numerous blogs maintained by edgy government critics such as avant-garde artist Ai Weiwei have been blocked and the text-messaging service Twitter and photo sharing site Flickr could not be accessed within China on Tuesday. Video sharing site YouTube has been blocked within China since March.

"We understand the Chinese government is blocking access to Flickr and other international sites, though the government has not issued any explanation," said Yahoo spokesman Jason Khoury. "We believe a broad restriction without a legal basis is inconsistent with the right to freedom of expression."

Officials from Twitter did not responded to a request for comment.

Authorities have been steadily tightening surveillance over China's dissident community ahead of this year's anniversary, with some leading writers already under house arrest for months.

Government critics, including activist Ding Zilin and former top government adviser Bao Tong, could not be reached amid reports that they had been ordered to leave the capital prior to the anniversary of the crackdown.

Bao, the 76-year-old former secretary to Zhao Ziyang, the Communist Party leader deposed for sympathizing with the 1989 pro-democracy protesters, had gone to his native province of Zhejiang and would not return for another week, according to a woman answering the phone at his Beijing apartment and identifying herself as the housemaid. She refused to say when he left Beijing or provide contact numbers for him in Zhejiang.

Ding, a retired professor and advocate for Tiananmen victims whose teenage son was killed in the crackdown, had said earlier that security agents "strongly suggested" she and her husband leave the capital during the anniversary. Repeated calls to her Beijing home met with busy signals.

Elsewhere, in the Zhejiang province city of Taizhou, former educator Wu Gaoxing - jailed for two years after the crackdown - was taken from his home by agents Saturday, shortly after the publication of a letter he had co-signed complaining about economic discrimination against dissidents, according to another of the letter's signatories, Mao Guoliang.

China has never allowed an independent investigation into the military's

crushing of the 1989 protests, in which possibly thousands of students, activists and ordinary citizens were killed. The subject remains taboo on the mainland, with officials routinely countering questions about Tiananmen with remarks on how much China has developed and prospered in the years since.

"The party and the government long ago reached a conclusion about the political incident that took place at the end of the 1980s and related issues," Foreign Ministry spokesman Qin Gang said at a regularly scheduled news conference Tuesday.

Despite the official silence, the crackdown remains a major topic for human rights groups and pro-democracy supporters in Chinese-ruled Hong Kong autonomous region, where this year's June 4 vigil is expected to draw tens of thousands.

Overseas monitoring groups estimate that 30 men remain imprisoned on charges relating to the protest, and Amnesty International issued an open letter this week to China's top legislator, Wu Bangguo, calling for their release.

Also Tuesday, exiled former student leader Chai Ling issued a rare public statement calling for the release of political prisoners, an independent investigation into the events, and permission for former student leaders to return home.

"The current generation of leaders who bear no responsibility should have the courage to overturn the verdicts" on the protests, said Chai's statement, distributed by the Hong Kong human rights center.

FTC Shuts Allegedly Rogue Internet Provider

The federal government has severed the Internet connection of a company accused of helping criminals serve up a "witches' brew" of nasty content online, from computer viruses to child pornography.

It's likely to be just a short-lived victory in the fight against cybercrime, though, since bad guys are very good at getting back online quickly.

The Federal Trade Commission said Thursday that it has ordered the shutdown of a company called Pricewert LLC, described in a complaint filed in San Jose, Calif., federal court as an Oregon-based shell company run by "overseas criminals", operating out of Belize and running many its illegal operations out of servers in Silicon Valley.

Pricewert, which operated the "Triple Fiber Network" or "3FN," wasn't the type of Internet service that average consumers would see or sign up for. Instead, the service was advertised "in the darkest corners of the Internet" and was targeted at criminals who want to put malicious Web sites online, but need the servers and bandwidth to do it, according to the complaint.

Technicians working for 3FN even helped criminals maintain the armies of personal computers that they had infected with viruses, according to the complaint. Those armies are known as "botnets," and they require some sophistication to manage.

The FTC says the case marks the first time the agency has ordered the shuttering of an Internet provider. The agency has usually focused on taking out harmful Web sites individually. Companies that host malicious Web sites are usually forced offline under pressure from the FBI or computer security researchers, but without a formal government order - which is what makes Thursday's announcement significant.

FTC Chairman Jon Leibowitz said the agency decided to move on 3FN after getting information about the company's behavior that made it "so clear this was a rogue (Internet service provider)" that the agency had a strong case against it.

"This is very, very important because rather than go after the individual spammers, in one action we can shut down a host of bad actors," Leibowitz said in an interview. "There's always a whack-a-mole problem in cases like this, but at the very least we've put a meaningful wrench in their gears."

The FTC's complaint draws a link between 3FN and a notorious Internet provider called McColo Corp., which was also operating out of a data center in Silicon Valley.

McColo was believed responsible for half of the world's spam before it was shut down in November. Spam dropped precipitously after McColo's Internet providers pulled the plug on McColo, but it has since rebounded.

When investigators from NASA looked into intrusions into some of its computers, they traced them back to McColo's servers. A search warrant later revealed those servers were also routing instant message conversations between 3FN employees and customers that formed the basis of some of the FTC's allegations.

A man who picked up the phone at one of 3FN's offices Thursday night said the company wasn't commenting and hung up.

Russia Launches Antitrust Probe of Microsoft

Russia's state anti-monopoly service launched a probe of Microsoft Corp over cutbacks in supplies of the Windows XP operating system in Russia, it said on Thursday.

The agency said it thought Microsoft had violated antimonopoly legislation by cutting delivery of Windows XP to Russia both separately and pre-installed on personal computers, as well as in its pricing policy on the product.

"Analysis of the market for various operating systems shows that the transfer to the new Windows Vista operating system is occurring while demand for the previous operating system, Windows XP, continues," the service said.

"Demand for separately packaged and pre-installed versions of Windows XP is also confirmed by retailers and the number of orders from the government."

It said it would consider the case on July 24, 2009.

Microsoft's Moscow office said it had not received an official query from the anti-monopoly service.

"We (have) always answered antimonopoly service questions in full and intend to continue this practice in future," Microsoft spokeswoman Marina Levina said by telephone.

The anti-monopoly service is regularly in contact with Russian companies but full-scale investigations are not common.

The suit bears no immediate resemblance to past antitrust claims against Microsoft, target of a U.S. antitrust lawsuit in the United States a decade ago, and which was fined 500 million euros (\$708.4 million) by the European Commission in 2004 for anti-competitive behavior in media player and server software.

The commission later fined Microsoft an additional 900 million euros for non-compliance but the software maker is appealing against that ruling.

Bartz: Yahoo Is Fine, Thank You, Without Microsoft

Yahoo will do perfectly fine even if it doesn't strike any type of deal with Microsoft, Yahoo CEO Carol Bartz said Wednesday.

There is excessive interest in whether the two companies will partner, and although some benefits could come from a tie-up, Yahoo will succeed regardless, she said.

"Yahoo doesn't have to do anything with Microsoft about anything," she said, speaking at the Bank of America and Merrill Lynch 2009 U.S. Technology Conference.

"Yahoo has a bright, bright future, probably cleaner and simpler without even thinking of any Microsoft connections," said Bartz, who answered questions from a financial analyst and from people in the audience.

"We'd be better off if we had never heard the word Microsoft," Bartz added. Speculation about mergers or other deals started after Microsoft's unsolicited acquisition offer early in 2008.

Bartz answered several questions about Yahoo and Microsoft, and acknowledged that a search partnership would help Yahoo better compete against Google by providing more scale and reducing some operating costs.

She also said that it would be a good idea for Yahoo to buy Microsoft's Internet unit, or parts of it, but that such a deal would never pass antitrust review in the U.S., particularly if it involved Yahoo acquiring Microsoft's webmail and instant messaging services.

Bartz also indicated that Microsoft's strategy on the Internet is very different from Yahoo's. Microsoft has "Google envy" and feels pressured to put up a stronger fight in the Internet market in order to curb Google's "money machine," which allows Google to make advances against Microsoft in office and communication software, she said. Yahoo, on the other hand, is entirely focused on the Internet.

Google's dominance in search is due more to its strong brand in the space, which has created a habit among users, and to the scale it has amassed, than to technical superiority, she said. Yahoo's search result relevance is better than Google's, she said.

About 98 percent of queries on Yahoo's search engine are made by people who are already on a Yahoo site, so the key to growing the company's search usage is to attract more people to Yahoo Web properties, she said. Yahoo isn't a search company, but rather a broader provider of useful online services and content, she added.

After five months as CEO, Bartz is exhilarated and excited about the future of the company, which she said had been held back by a management structure that made it difficult to act quickly. "Anything you can do in three steps, Yahoo does it in 22," she said.

The argument that Yahoo missed the boat on social networking and video is flawed because both areas are still in their infancy, and Yahoo approaches them differently by attempting to use those technologies in the context of its Web sites.

Thus, Yahoo's interest is to enrich existing services with video and social features rather than go head-to-head against Facebook or Twitter in social networking or YouTube and Hulu in video sharing and broadcasting.

While Yahoo does a good job assisting chief marketing officers with the creative part of their advertising campaigns, it is horrible at making it easy for marketers to purchase ads, she said. "We have to take a lot of that friction out" of buying online ads, she said.

Another key area for Yahoo is mobile, and the emphasis now is on attracting users. "Monetization is the last thing on my mind. I want the audience. You get the audience and you get the money," she said.

Bing Zips Past Yahoo To Be Number Two in Search

Microsoft's new search service, Bing, has hit the Internet with a bang. The search engine made available on May 28 has surpassed Yahoo search in its first week, according to StatCounter Global Status, an Internet research firm that tracks page loads.

Its Internet traffic has made Bing number two on the list of top search engines in the U.S. and worldwide. In the U.S., Bing passed Yahoo on Thursday for second place with 16.28 percent of the market, while Yahoo dropped to third with 10.22 percent.

Microsoft brought Bing to the search-engine table to solve several problems it found with search, including a report that said 30 percent of searches are abandoned without a satisfactory result.

Bing uses features such as Best Match to find the best answer for a search, Deep Links to give searchers information on what a Web site offers, and Quick Preview, an additional window that expands over a search caption to give users more information about the site's relevancy. The search engine also incorporates Instant Answers, a feature designed to provide information within the body of the search-results page.

Google still dominates the U.S. search market with 71.47 percent, according to StatCounter. Globally, Bing has taken a smaller lead over Yahoo at 5.62 percent, while Yahoo has 5.13 percent and Google 87.62 percent.

"It is big news and is a big change," said Aodhan Cullen, chief executive of StatCounter, from his office in Ireland. "Bing just came on a few days ago and has taken the number-two slot both in the U.S. and worldwide."

While Bing began its leap from day one with 2.07 percent, then climbed to 3.65 percent, it did drop off on its third day to 3.46 percent. As of Thursday, however, Bing regained its footing and had 5.56 percent of the market, leaping past Yahoo.

Cullen said the company has plans to closely monitor the progression of Bing to see if the search engine, or "decision engine," can sustain its number-two spot.

"It looks promising at the moment," he added. "I definitely thought it would have taken a little longer for them to achieve this."

Microsoft CEO Steve Ballmer has said Microsoft's plan is to make Bing the second-biggest search engine within five years. If Bing can sustain the number-two slot, the company would have achieved its goal four years earlier than expected.

With more than 80 percent of the market worldwide and more than 70 percent in the U.S., Google is obviously the dominant search player.

"Obviously Google is hugely dominating, but there is a demand for an alternative search engine to use," Cullen said. "In any industry it is not good to have one dominant player, and it is better for the industry and better for the market in general."

Smarter Google Squared Fires Back at Microsoft's Bing

Google wants the searching population to forget about Bing and focus on its latest product: Squared.

Google Squared is an experimental search tool that collects facts from the Web and presents them in an organized collection, similar to a spreadsheet. If users search for roller coasters, for example, Google Squared builds a square with rows for each of several specific roller coasters and columns for corresponding facts, such as image, height and maximum speed.

"Some information is easy to find. If you want to learn the rules of golf, you can search Google for 'golf rules' and we'll return a list of relevant Web sites right at the top," said Alex Komoroske, an associate product manager for Google Squared. "But not all your information needs are that simple. Some questions can be more complex, requiring you to visit 10, perhaps 20, Web sites to research and collect what you need."

Continuing with the roller-coaster theme, Komoroske drills down into Google Squared's value compared to the market leader's traditional

search box. In the past, Komoroske said he has used Google to search for information about roller coasters, such as which ones are the tallest, fastest and have the most loops.

"Finding this information used to take multiple searches - I'd find roller-coaster sizes on one Web site, heights on another, and speeds on a third. By manually comparing the sites, I could get the information I was looking for, but it took some time," Komoroske said. "With Google Squared, a new feature just released in Google Labs, I can find my roller-coaster facts almost instantly."

Komoroske pointed to the technology behind Google Squared. While gathering facts from across the Internet is relatively easy for humans to do, he said, it's far more difficult for computers to do automatically. He called Google Squared a first step toward solving that challenge by searching the Web to find the types of facts users might be interested in, extracting them, and presenting them in a meaningful way.

"This technology is by no means perfect. That's why we designed Google Squared to be conversational, enabling you to respond to the initial result and get a better answer," Komoroske said. "If there's another row or column you'd like to see, you can add it and Google Squared will automatically attempt to fetch and fill in the relevant facts for you. As you remove rows and columns you don't like, Google Squared will get a fresh idea of what you're interested in and suggest new rows and columns to add."

Google Squared's approach may sound somewhat similar to Bing's organizational capabilities from a conceptual standpoint, but Squared's results aren't up to par with Bing, according to Greg Sterling, principal analyst at Sterling Market Intelligence.

"Squared is very interesting as an alternative way to display and compare information. The fact that it can be configured both in terms of the content that you compare horizontally and vertically could be helpful in many ways," Sterling said. "But it's definitely an experimental project."

If Google Squared does catch on, Google would have a different challenge: How to integrate it into its classic search results. Hypothetically, Sterling said, Google could allow users to conduct searches and then offer a prompt box to open a window that would show the results through Google Squared.

"Google has proven that it can integrate new features into search. That is something that over the past year or so Google has done well," Sterling said. "But this is still very much of an experimental project."

Thousands of Web Sites Stung by Mass Hacking Attack

Up to 40,000 Web sites have been hacked to redirect unwitting victims to another Web site that tries to infect PCs with malicious software, according to security vendor Websense.

The affected sites have been hacked to host JavaScript code that directs people to a fake Google Analytics Web site, which provides data for Web site owners on a site's usage, then to another bad site, said Carl

Leonard, threat research manager for Websense.

Those Web sites have likely been hacked via a SQL injection attack, in which improperly configured Web applications accept malicious data and get hacked, Leonard said.

Another possibility is that the FTP credentials for the sites have somehow been obtained by hackers, giving them access to the inner workings of the site. It appears the hackers are using automated tools to seek out vulnerable Web sites, Leonard said.

The latest campaign underscore the success hackers have at hosting dangerous code on poorly secured Web sites.

Once a user has been directed to the bogus Google analytics site, it redirects again to another malicious domain. That site tests to see if the PC has software vulnerabilities in either Microsoft's Internet Explorer browser or Firefox that can be exploited in order to deliver malware, Leonard said.

If it doesn't find a problem there, it will launch a fake warning saying the computer is infected with malware and tries to get the user to willingly download a program that purports to be security software but is actually a Trojan downloader, Leonard said. Those fake security programs are often called "scareware" and don't work as advertised.

As of last Friday, only four of 39 security software programs could detect that Trojan, although that's now likely changed as vendors such as Websense swap malware samples with other companies in order to improve overall Internet security.

It's not clear what the hackers are doing with the newly compromised PCs, although it's possible they can be configured to send spam, become part of a botnet or have data stolen from them.

The malicious domain serving up the malware is hosted in the Ukraine, the same region where notorious Russian Business Network (RBN) operated. RBN is a gang of cybercriminals involved in phishing campaigns and other malicious activity, Leonard said. That Web site appeared to be down as of Tuesday afternoon. The RBN is thought to be inactive now.

"Whether this is a part of that group or whether it's a copycat using some of the techniques that are similar to those used by the malware group in the past we are not quite certain yet," Leonard said. "It is very difficult to pinpoint the exact people behind this."

Since so many Web sites have been hacked to deliver the attack, it's nearly impossible to contact them all, Leonard said.

Websense said the latest attacks don't appear to be related to Gumblar, a malware campaign under way last month. Gumblar resulted in at least 3,000 Web sites getting infected with malicious code that scanned users' computers for vulnerabilities in Adobe Systems software.

Once on a PC, Gumblar steals FTP log-in credentials, using that information to help spread to other computers. It also commandeers a person's Web browser and replaces Google search results with other dangerous links.

'Embarrassing' Mistake Puts US Nuke List Online

The government's inadvertent and red-faced Internet posting of a 266-page list of U.S. nuclear sites provided a one-step guide for anyone wanting details about such sensitive information. Obama administration officials said Wednesday the document contained no classified material about nuclear weapons. They contended the locations and other details already were available from public sources.

Energy Secretary Steven Chu said "a snafu" led to the online posting. "A little embarrassing," he acknowledged.

The document, stamped "highly confidential safeguards sensitive," made it onto the Government Printing Office's Web site - and why that happened was not immediately clear. A newsletter that focuses on government secrecy quickly picked up on it. The printing office removed the document when informed "about the potential sensitive nature" of the list, the agency said.

By then it was too late.

The information, compiled for international nuclear inspectors, is a compilation of hundreds of civilian nuclear sites, along with maps and details of the facilities. The material includes sites for uranium storage, nuclear fuel fabrication plants and nuclear research facilities.

"It's an easy locator for civilian sites," Thomas D'Agostino, head of the National Nuclear Security Administration, told Sen. Bill Nelson, D-Fla., when questions about the disclosure came up at a Senate Armed Services subcommittee hearing.

"We don't want to make this easier for people to get this kind of information. Unfortunately something like this makes it easier," D'Agostino said.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., said the release exposed lax safeguards. She asked congressional investigators to review the incident.

Chu said he was stepping up security at one of the sites, a storage facility for highly enriched uranium at the Y-12 Oak Ridge complex in Tennessee. "That's of great concern," he told a House Appropriations subcommittee when asked about the disclosure.

Oak Ridge holds large quantities of highly enriched uranium, which can be used to fashion a nuclear weapon. The department plans to move the material into \$549 million high-security warehouse to be completed next year.

"There's no secret or classified information that's been compromised. ... The sites and everything are public knowledge," Chu told reporters.

Steven Aftergood, director of the Federation of American Scientists' government secrecy project, which distributed the document, said he was perplexed about all the attention surrounding the disclosure.

"Some people are painting this as a road map for terrorists, which it is not," Aftergood said. "It is simply a listing of the numerous nuclear research sites and the programs that are under way. So it poses no

security threat whatsoever."

In addition to the Y-12 facility, the document lists facilities at the Hanford nuclear site in Washington state and various civilian nuclear fuel processing sites, including one that produces nuclear fuel for the Navy.

Beth Hayden, a spokeswoman for the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, said the agency reviewed the document as it relates to civilian facilities with NRC licenses. "We are confident that information of direct national security significance was not compromised," she said.

The NRC has jurisdiction over commercial nuclear power plants and civilian uranium processing and storage facilities.

The Government Printing Office processes and produces various congressional documents. The lengthy nuclear list was transmitted to Congress in advance of providing it to the International Atomic Energy Agency as part of a nonproliferation-related inspection program.

Some of the pages are marked "highly confidential safeguards sensitive," a designation used by the IAEA, but not the U.S. government.

New Opera Web Browser Offers More Tab Options

Web browsers from the Norwegian company Opera Software ASA have been better known for their innovation than their usage.

For instance, they sported the ability to open multiple tabs in a single window long before that became standard practice. Now a new version available as a "beta" test lets you work with those tabs more easily.

A resizable tab bar in Opera 10 lets you stretch the row of tabs at the top so that mini, "thumbnail" versions of your open pages appear inside. That way, you can choose which tab to switch to based on the appearance of the Web page, not just its name.

Thumbnails aren't new to browsers. Microsoft Corp.'s Internet Explorer offers them, as do previous versions of Opera. But Opera 10 lets you see those thumbnails up top while you continue to browse a Web site normally in the larger space below. IE lets you do one or the other.

Opera 10 retains the Speed Dial feature, which displays thumbnails of your favorite sites, not just your open ones - similar to what's available on Google Inc.'s Chrome and Apple Inc.'s Safari browsers. You simply click on any thumbnail to load the full site.

The new version is more customizable: Instead of just nine Speed Dial sites, you can choose four to 25.

The new Opera browser also has built-in compression technology that can help improve browsing speeds, particularly for those with dial-up Internet access. Such technology is commonly offered by Internet service providers, but not by browsers.

It's not clear whether any of these features will significantly improve Opera's market share, which is tiny compared with market leader Internet

Explorer and the increasingly popular Firefox. Unlike IE, though, Opera has versions for Mac and Linux computers as well.

Windows 7 Confirmed for Holiday Season PCs

Microsoft Corp. said Tuesday that Windows 7, the next version of its computer operating software, will go on sale Oct. 22, in time to possibly give the slumping PC industry a lift in the holiday season.

Windows 7, which will replace the much-complained-about Windows Vista, will be available then on new PCs. Microsoft, the world's largest software maker, will also sell versions that people can install on existing PCs.

PC makers and resellers will offer free upgrades to Windows 7 for people who buy a new computer running the Home Premium, Business or Ultimate version of Windows Vista shortly before Windows 7 arrives. However, Microsoft did not say whether the upgrade program will begin in time for back-to-school shopping, another crucial period for the PC industry.

Industry analyst Roger Kay of Endpoint Technologies said it's reasonable to think Microsoft would offer upgrades two months in advance of Windows 7's launch - late August, in other words.

"The industry must be careful not to kill sales leading up to the introduction, and back-to-school is the first possibility of some relief in this market," Kay said.

Hackers Claim \$10,000 Prize for Breaking Into StrongWebmail

Hackers love a challenge. And more than that, they love cash.

That's what Telesign found out this week. A provider of voice-based authentication software, the company challenged hackers to break into its StrongWebmail.com Web site late last week. The prize? US\$10,000.

On Thursday, a group of security researchers claimed to have won the contest, which challenged hackers to break into the Web mail account of StrongWebmail CEO Darren Berkovitz and report back details from his June 26 calendar entry.

The hackers, led by Secure Science Chief Scientist Lance James and security researchers Aviv Raff and Mike Bailey, provided details from Berkovitz's calendar to IDG News Service. In an interview, Berkovitz confirmed those details were from his account.

However, Berkovitz could not confirm that the hackers had actually won the prize. He said he would need to check to confirm that the hackers had abided by the contest rules, adding, "if someone did it, we'll kind of put our heads down," he said.

Contest rules prevent the researchers from disclosing how they performed their attack, but they were also able to compromise a test StrongWebmail account set up by IDG News Service. The IDG attack did not work

initially, but succeeded when security software called NoScript was disabled on the Firefox browser, running on a Windows XP machine.

"We found multiple cross-site attacks that allow us to attack other users," James said. "You have to have a registered account to launch the attack."

StrongWebmail uses Telisign's telephone authentication system to give webmail users another layer of security. Instead of logging in with a username and password, customers must also enter a secret code that gets telephoned to them whenever they want to log into the site.

Banks have been using these phone-based authentication servers to help fight cybercriminals who often steal usernames and passwords from victims.

But this kind of authentication - called two-factor authentication - can be thwarted by hackers using what's known as a man-in-the middle attack. In this attack, the hacker's software waits for the user to legitimately log into the Web site and then takes over. "They just wait for you to log in and they can do whatever they want," James said.

James said that these contests might be fun, but they don't provide a realistic measure of real security because they are encumbered with rules. The StrongWebmail contest prohibits working with a company insider, for example. "A bad guy won't care about rules, he said.

Webmail security has gotten a lot of attention over the past year. In September a hacker gained access to Alaska Governor Sarah Palin's e-mail account and published details of her correspondence on the Internet. A college student named David Kernell has been charged in that incident.

Whatever the contest's outcome, Berkovitz says he hopes his contest gets users - and webmail providers like Google and Yahoo - thinking more about security. "We're not claiming that this is the ultimate, ultimate solution," he said. "But we're trying to bring attention to the username and password portion."

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